

Again and again polls conducted in the United States show that most people believe in God. At least, they believe in some sort of a god. Very often, though, we don't have a very clear idea of what God is like. How is he introduced in the Bible? What does the Bible say we should think about God? Walk through this brief Bible study to see.

Is there just one God?

Deuteronomy 6:4

Ephesians 4:4-6

What are some of the important ways we understand God?

How long does he last?

Psalm 90:2

Is he physical?

John 4:24

Genesis 1:1-2

Is he divided?

James 1:17

Deuteronomy 6:4

Is he powerful?

Ps. 62:11

Ps. 18:13-15

Daniel 4:35

Matthew 8:2-3

Is he wise?

Proverbs 1:7

James 1:5

James 3:13-18

1 Corinthians 1:25

Is he good?

Mark 10:17-18

Psalm 119:68

Nehemiah 9:16-21

Acts 10:34-38

Often we will picture God's sovereign power, wisdom, and goodness as a very important family. Consider what would happen if one of those attributes were missing.

The Bible presents God as the one who made everything.

Genesis 1

Exodus 20:11

John 1:1-3

Acts 4:23-24

Acts 7:49-50

The Bible also shows God as the one who preserves everything.

Nehemiah 9:6

Hebrews 1:1-3

John 5:17

Colossians 1:15-20

The God of the Bible is one God but he reveals himself to the world in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All these persons are the one true God.

Matthew 28:19

Matthew 3:16-17

John 10:37-38

1 John 5:6-8

What are some unbiblical ideas about God?

- 1) You need special secret knowledge to know God.
- 2) God the Father created the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- 3) Jesus was just a man who was inspired of God.
- 4) God the Son is only God but has no human nature.
- 5) God is one, appearing in any one of three different forms, but only existing as one person at any one time.

What is the purpose of studying God in the Bible? By knowing who God is we can know who we are and what our place is in this world. We are created beings, needing the powerful, wise, and good God to work in our lives. He has done this by sending Jesus, God the Son, truly man and truly God, to suffer for our sins and to present us holy and blameless before God. This is God's mercy in action.

Who Is God?

#1 of the *That You May Know* Bible Study Series

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Christians often talk about the idea of “sin.” How does the Bible describe this condition? Are all people sinners? How important is that? What do we do about it?

What is sin?

Compare sin and righteousness in Ephesians 5:3-21

See some of God’s demands in Exodus 20:2-17.

Sin is often described as any failure to keep God’s demands. It shows that we are not perfectly in God’s image as we were created to be.

How do we describe God’s image?

Genesis 1:27

James 1:17-18

Ephesians 5:9

Psalm 145:8

Matthew 5:48

What happens as a result of sin?

Romans 5:12

Romans 6:23

1 Corinthians 2:14

John 3:5

Who has sin?

Psalm 51:1-5

Ephesians 2:1-3

Romans 3:23

What hope can we have?

Romans 5:6-14

Ephesians 2:4-10

Romans 7:4-6

What are some unbiblical ideas about sin?

- 1) We become sinful because we sin.
- 2) Sin can be minimized.
- 3) My sins are too great for God's forgiveness.

The Bible describes all of us as people who are sinful by nature. Because God cannot accept sin, we would naturally have no hope. But God has shown His love for us by taking our sin upon himself in the person of Jesus, who died for us. As we believe his death is for us, he gives us his perfect, sinless life.

A Sinner??

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Christianity is all about Jesus, the one called the “Son of God.” Is this Jesus a myth? What did he do? Some of the ideas we may get from our broader culture are not the ideas the Bible gives us.

What’s happening with the Father and Son?

John 1:1-18

Luke 1:26-38

Is God the Father like the other gods who have many children?

John 1:18

Matthew 3:17

John 3:16

Hebrews 1:5

Why did Jesus come?

John 1:29

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Matthew 1:21

Luke 19:10

Is Jesus God?

John 1:1

Hebrews 1:5

John 10:30

John 14:9

Is the Son of God a human?

Colossians 2:9

John 1:14

Did he really die? Why?

Matthew 20:19

John 19:18

Romans 5:6-8

2 Corinthians 13:4

2 Corinthians 5:15

Matthew 27:2, 26

1 Timothy 6:13

What happened next?

1 Peter 2:21

Hebrews 2:10

Mark 15:46

1 Corinthians 15:4

Mark 16:6

2 Timothy 2:8

What is Jesus now doing?

Luke 24:51

Acts 1:8-11

Psalm 110:1

Matthew 26:64

Acts 7:56

Hebrews 1:3

Will Jesus come again? How?

1 Thessalonians 4:16

Matthew 25:31-46

2 Timothy 4:1, 18

What are some unbiblical ideas about the Son of God?

- 1) Jesus is only a human.
- 2) Jesus is only God.
- 3) Jesus didn't really die.
- 4) Jesus' death was not for our sins.
- 5) There is some way other than Jesus' death to destroy sin.

The Bible presents Jesus as the living God, the person of the Trinity who bore our sin and satisfied God's righteous anger against sin. He is the one we must trust for forgiveness and life. There is no hope or salvation without Jesus, the Son of God.

Who Is the Son of God?

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Christians teach that sin has separated us from God. But how are we made right with God again? Theologians call this “justification.” So we’ll use that word too. How can I be justified before God?

God has given commands. Will keeping God's commands justify me?

Read Deuteronomy chapter 5. How serious is God about obedience?

Romans 10:1-13

John 3:16-21

1 Peter 1:13-21

Romans 3:21-26

James 2:8-11

Psalm 130:1-8

What does God's Law do?

Galatians 3:23-29

Is this justification something we earn by how well we believe?

Ephesians 2:1-10

1 Timothy 1:8-11

Many Christians talk about three different uses of the Law. It may serve as a curb, a mirror, and a guide. As a curb, it hinders evil. As a mirror, it shows us the evil in ourselves. As a guide, it shows us what is pleasing to God.

If we are not justified by the Law, how are we justified?

Galatians 5:3-6

Am I free to do whatever I wish as someone who believes Jesus?

Consider Ephesians 2:10.

Romans 6:1-23

Galatians 5:16-26

How Are We Made Right Before God?

What are some unbiblical ideas about justification?

- 1) We do something to earn favor.
- 2) We can repent of sin well enough for God.
- 3) We have to wonder whether Jesus loves us or not.
- 4) Some Christians are more justified than others.
- 5) Being justified has no influence on how we live.

The Bible presents Jesus as the one who has died for our sin so we could live by believing that he gives us life. He is the one who gives us forgiveness and hope. It is not by our works, but by his work. It is not by our obedience, but by his obedience. We who have been given life by faith in Jesus in turn strive to live in a way pleasing to God, delighting in believing that he has cared for us.

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Ephesians 2:8 says we are saved by grace through faith. Where does that faith come from? Is it our decision? Do we just wait until God gives us faith? How do we know we have faith?

In our previous studies we have seen that sin separates us from God and that before God saves us we are considered as dead. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves.

What righteous work can I do outside of faith in Christ?

Read Romans 3:9-20. What is the hope that everyone can gain from this passage?

Ephesians 2:1-3 – What does God say we do apart from Christ?

How am I saved from death?

Ephesians 2:4-10

Romans 3:21-26

Isn't faith something we do? It seems like a work we would do to save ourselves.

In the Bible, as in the rest of life, a work is something we do. It is an act of obedience or disobedience. A belief, or faith, is not something we do. It is something which results in action. For instance, our belief that it is going to rain may result in our bringing an umbrella with us. But the belief is not the same as the action which results.

God calls us to believe that Jesus is the Son of God who has given himself to rescue us from sin and death. Believing and trusting is not something we do. But it is something we need.

How do we have faith which is focused on Jesus?

Read Romans 1:18-32. Do all people have some sort of faith? If so, what does our faith most naturally trust?

Based on Romans 1:18-32, will we come to trust Jesus through our own efforts without some sort of help? Why do you think that?

How do we receive faith?

Romans 10:8-17

John 17:17

Matthew 28:18-20

What are some unbiblical ideas about receiving faith?

- 1) Believing Jesus is something we do.
- 2) The object of faith doesn't matter.
- 3) We can believe to salvation without the influence of the Word of God.
- 4) God cannot use earthly elements such as water, wine, and bread in his work of creating faith through his proclaimed word.

Jesus has given himself, a very specific person, in a very specific situation, to suffer and die for the sins of the world. Through the proclamation of the Bible and the administration of the Sacraments we can believe that Jesus is the true Son of God and that he has taken our place in death. Without this word, whether read, spoken, or enacted, we will not believe Jesus and cannot come to faith in him.

How Does God Deliver Faith?

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Ephesians 2:8-9 talks about how we do nothing, no good work, in order that we may be Christians. The Christian life is not based on the quality of our repentance, faith, or changed character. Does this mean that we live in Christ just as we lived before believing Jesus? Are there any differences we should expect in the lives of Christians?

What is the Christian's duty?

Luke 7:7-10

Micah 6:6-8

Luke 10:25-28

Are we serving God or serving man? Both?

James 2:8-20

Romans 3:21-26

Ecclesiastes 12:11-14

Matthew 7:15-29

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

The idea of serving someone may imply that the one we serve needs our service. This is not always the case. Sometimes the one we serve simply wants our service but could do just fine without it. Christians do serve God by doing what is pleasing to him. But our primary service is to our neighbor, because God delights in it when we are his instruments to care for our neighbor, who does need our good works.

Read and meditate on Psalm 50:7-15.

Once again we are wise to consider the relationship between faith and works.

Read Romans 4:1-25

How was Abraham declared right before God?

What did circumcision (an act of obedience) do in the life of Abraham?

What did the law of God do in Abraham's case?

Where did Abraham get his hope?

Why did Abraham submit to circumcision?

What are some unbiblical ideas about good works?

- 1) Our goodness will be measured against our evil to decide our destiny.
- 2) God needs us to do good so he can be fulfilled.
- 3) God needs us to do good so he can accomplish his work.
- 4) Since we are saved by grace we don't do good works.
- 5) Everyone should always do all the same kind of good works.

Christians believe we are saved by grace, through faith, but that our salvation results in good works, works which help our neighbor (that person we are in contact with). Though these good works don't earn us any merit before God and they shouldn't be used by us to earn glory before our neighbor, they are still good. We should do all we can to care for the people around us, since our Lord cares for them.

Are Good Works Important?

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What is the Church? Is it a manmade institution? Is it a divine institution? How do we define an institution? What makes the Church the Church and not something else?

Take a moment to write down your definition of the Church.

How does the Bible describe the Church?

Ephesians 4:1-6

Matthew 3:12

Matthew 13:44-50

Ephesians 1:22-23

How does the Church function?

1 Timothy 3

elders/overseers/bishops

deacons/servants

the goals of the Church

What holds the Church together?

Ephesians 5:25-27

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

Are some elements optional?

Colossians 2:16-23

Romans 14:17

What is essential?

Galatians 1:9

16th century theologian Phillip Melanchthon wrote the following in Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession:

1] Also they teach that one holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.
2] And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and 3] the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. 4] As Paul says: One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, etc. Eph. 4:5-6.

Isn't the Church Just Man's Organization?

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Sometimes people will talk about the “visible” and “invisible” Church. In doing so they refer to all Christian believers everywhere and at all time as the “invisible” Church and the local organization as the “visible” church. How does the Bible say the Church is recognized?

Romans 12:1-8

What is the relationship of the faithful, the unfaithful, and the Church?

Matthew 13:24-30

1 Corinthians 12-14

Matthew 23:2

What, if any, distinction is there between the faithful and unfaithful, believing and unbelieving?

Acts 2:37-41

What are the ruling characteristics of the way God would have His people exercise the gifts they have been given? (Consider the passages above.)

What makes the believing Church recognizable?

Acts 2:42-47

What influence do different generations have on one another?

Mark 12:26-27

What are some unbiblical Views of the Church?

- 1) The true church is invisible in the sense that it cannot be recognized.
- 2) Only where Word and Sacrament are perfectly administered can the Church exist.
- 3) Sacrament given by an unbeliever is ineffective.
- 4) It doesn't matter how God's Word is given or received.

The true Church exists in every age at the same time. It consists of all those who believe on Jesus. Word and Sacrament are used together to create and sustain that belief. Belief on Jesus can normally be recognized in changed lives, though this is not altogether reliable.

What Is the Church?

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Most Americans view baptism as a symbolic act performed by the Christian. Most Christians through history have viewed baptism as an act of God which effectively rescues people from sin. What does the Bible tell us about baptism?

Jesus commands baptism.

Matthew 28:18-20 (Greek indicates that the baptism is part of what makes disciples)

Mark 16:16

What effects do the apostles Peter and Paul say that baptism has?

Acts 2:37-41

Titus 3:5-8

Romans 6:1-14 (compare the death and life images)

Review the Bible passages already studied. When are we finished becoming disciples / growing in Christ / changing in our lives? What does this say about the effects of baptism?

What does the Bible say about bringing even young children to faith in Jesus?

Mark 10:13-15

Luke 18:15-17

John 3:5-6

Ephesians 2:3

Matthew 18:6

What does baptism accomplish?

Galatians 3:27

Colossians 1:13-14

Colossians 2:11-12

Titus 3:5

1 Peter 3:21 – note the NIV translates the metaphor in the Greek exactly in reverse.

What are some unbiblical views of baptism?

- 1) Baptism is merely a human sign of repentance.
- 2) Baptism is not in itself effective.
- 3) There is no need for training before or after baptism.
- 4) Children have no need of forgiveness.

Baptism is a gift given by God, applied by the Holy Spirit through his human instrument using the means of water and God's Word. It brings forgiveness. As we trust that Jesus has saved us from sin through baptism we also continue learning the importance of that forgiveness, growing in godly character and in trust in the Lord who has washed us from sin.

What Is Baptism?

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Christians have always celebrated “communion.” Though it goes by several different names, it's the same celebration. Or is it? Some churches view it differently from other churches. What is this celebration?

Jesus “instituted” communion. Look for the important elements in the following passages of the Bible.

Matthew 26:26-28

Mark 14:22-24

Luke 22:19-20

1 Corinthians 11:23-25

body – bread – blood – wine – forgiveness

What do Christians believe about communion?

Bread and wine are symbols only. This is our symbolic meal.

Jesus is spiritually present but only bread and wine are physically present.

Jesus is present bodily and in his substance and divine essence in communion, though he is not perceptible.

It's possible to try to explain the “how” and “why” of all the views above. Lutherans, who subscribe to the third view, make a self-conscious effort NOT to explain the “how” or “why” beyond stating that Jesus said it was this way.

What else is communion called?

Lord's Supper

Eucharist (Greek word meaning “giving of thanks”)

Lord's Table

Sacrament (Latin word meaning that which makes one holy)

It seems odd, even wrong, to picture Jesus giving himself to be eaten and drunk. Isn't this a misunderstanding of the Bible?

Jesus is referred to in the Bible in terms of food.

John 6:25-59

1 Corinthians 10:16-22

In communion, Lutherans confess that we receive the true body and blood of Jesus for our forgiveness. Specifically, theologians will say that Jesus is bodily, substantially, and essentially present under the perceptible elements.

substantially = in his substance physically, not simply spiritually
essentially = in his divine and human nature, his being

We don't explain how this came to be. The Roman Catholic Church has made an attempt to explain it, resulting in a denial that the wine and bread are still in existence. Lutherans consider that the Roman church has gone beyond Scripture.

Jesus says that communion is the way it is according to his will. We need no further explanation.

What Is Communion?

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The Bible calls us to confess our sins and seek God's forgiveness. For many centuries it was normal for people to come to a pastor and confess sins, receiving forgiveness and counsel. How does this private confession work? Is it good and right?

Does everyone have sin?

Romans 3:9-10

Romans 3:23

Psalms 14:3

Ephesians 2:3

Galatians 2:21

1 Peter 2:22

Some people in the Bible are treated as righteous.

Job 1:1

Genesis 7:1

Luke 1:5-6

When God calls people righteous he refers to the idea that they are acting in faith, believing God's promises. The Bible often uses Abraham as an example of this.

Genesis 15:6

Galatians 3:6

Romans 4:3

James 2:23

We receive forgiveness of sins as we confess them, trusting God will forgive us.

1 John 1:9

James 5:16

Psalms 32:5

Psalms 51:1-19

1 John 2:1

Hebrews 4:16

Matthew 9:6-8

People in the Bible make confession not only before God but also before his human servants, who are ministers of forgiveness.

2 Samuel 12:13

Acts 19:18

James 5:16

John 20:19-24

As we make confession of our sins to God, often it is helpful to make that confession before one of His servants as well, who will remind and assure us that God's forgiveness and grace is for us. While the Bible does not say the only appropriate servant is a pastor, it is the pastor who is responsible before God to care for us, to pray for us, and to hold our sin and guilt in confidence, protecting us from harm and shame.

Confession before a pastor is especially common when preparing to receive communion. At that time especially we prepare to present ourselves as a holy offering to God and may well need assurance of His forgiveness.

If our conscience is not troubled by specific sins we may wish to make a more general confession, such as we do in a church service. But if there are specifics we are aware of and troubled by, we do well to bring those before a pastor who will pray for us and remind us of our Lord's forgiveness.

Why Would I Confess Sins before a Pastor?

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Sometimes we use terms like “repentance” in the Church. This isn't something most of us talk about in our daily life. What is repentance? How is it tied in to the Christian life?

God gives us forgiveness when we “repent” of our sins.

Ezekiel 18:21-32

Matthew 18:15-22

What is repentance?

A very basic definition of repentance is being sorry for doing wrong. Most people would include the idea that we are sorry enough to desire to correct the wrong.

There are two parts to repentance

1) Contrition – being sorry for the wrong
Psalm 38:4, 8

Psalm 6:2-3

Isaiah 38:10, 13

Isaiah 38:14

2) Faith – trusting Jesus' forgiveness

Romans 5:1

Ephesians 2:17-18

Romans 10:17

Matthew 11:28

Mark 1:15

We do not pay for our sin. Jesus has done that. We may still have consequences for our sin, which our repentance might not take away. Yet as we are sorry for our sin and trust Jesus' forgiveness we have assurance that our relationship with God will be restored.

Repentance naturally results in good works.

Matthew 3:8

Romans 6:19

Acts 20:21

Acts 2:38

Ephesians 2:8-10

What are some unbiblical views of repentance?

- 1) If you have ever believed on Jesus you are safe, regardless of whether you live a life of repentance or not.
- 2) We can become so holy in this life that we cannot sin.
- 3) You cannot be forgiven if you believe, fall into sin, and are again repentant.
- 4) We must add to Jesus' work of forgiveness by our own good works beyond repentance and faith.

What Is Repentance?

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"Sacrament" is a word with a very specific definition. To be a sacrament, the action, received by faith, operates to create or sustain holiness.

What are the results of a life of holiness?

2 Thessalonians 1:3-5

How do we identify a sacrament?

"A rite commanded by God along with a promise of grace"

(baptism, communion, absolution)

Martin Luther considered absolution to be an extension of baptism, not entirely a separate sacrament.

Rome identifies and insists on seven sacraments.

(baptism, confirmation, communion, absolution, marriage, taking of holy orders, and last rites)

As a means of grace, we expect to find a particular pattern.

Romans 10:17

Augustine described a sacrament as a visible Word, received by the eyes.

Is a practice of the Church bad simply because it does not have God's command and promise?
(examples)

Do ordination and marriage have both God's command and promise?

Leviticus 8-9

Isaiah 55:11

Romans 1:16

Genesis 1:28

If everything commanded by God is a sacrament, then there are many different sacraments.

Does a sacrament work simply by doing the action?

Romans 4:9-12

Luke 22:20-22

Romans 10:10

We pursue the sacraments by faith, trusting that God will use them to perfect us in faith by his grace.

What Is a Sacrament?

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How does someone become a pastor or other church worker? Does the "priesthood of all believers" mean that any Christian should be preaching and administering sacraments?

The New Testament speaks of "pastor" "elder" and "overseer/bishop" as the same person. This office is an extension of both the Old Testament priestly and prophetic offices.

Matthew 28:18-20

1 Timothy 3:1-7

2 Timothy 4:1-5

2 Timothy 2:14-16

Hebrews 5:1-4

How do we identify those who are to serve Christ's Church as pastors?

How can a local congregation start training those people who will serve as leaders?

2 Timothy 2:2

Ephesians 4:11-16

Is there any reason why advanced college and seminary training would not be appropriate for those who would lead?

What are some responsibilities that pastors and teachers have?

Hebrews 13:17

1 Peter 4:11

James 3:1

How do we take care of pastors and teachers?

1 Timothy 5:17-25

1 Timothy 5:1-2

Those who are appointed to serve as elders, pastors, and bishops, have received a gift from God, as well as a difficult calling. It is a serious burden, which can be done only with the help of the Holy Spirit.

The Lutheran confessions say that none should preach and teach or administer the sacraments without having been called in a right and orderly way. While they don't say clearly what that way is, history indicates that it involves reception of training and a public recognition involving the laying on of hands and being placed into the ministry in a particular place by others.

The pastoral calling is a blessing, both to the men God calls and to those they are called to serve.

Who Teaches and Leads in the Church?

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Some churches have a lot of formal ceremonies. Some have very few.
What's the purpose?

List some good ceremonies of the church, along with the purpose of those ceremonies.

Which of these ceremonies earns us favor with God?

How should we view ceremonies in the church?

Colossians 2:16-17

What can go wrong with our churchly ceremonies?

Acts 15:1

1 Timothy 4:1

Matthew 15:8-9

How are we justified before God?

Ephesians 2:8-9

What happens when we try to be justified by our ceremonies?

Galatians 5:4

Galatians 3:10-12

What do our attempts at self-justification say about Christ?

Galatians 2:21

Who do we follow?

Ezekiel 20:18-20

1 Kings 12:26-33

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4

How can ceremonies in the church be helpful?

1 Corinthians 14:40

Do we accept them?

Colossians 2:16-17

Some church bodies reject non-biblical ceremonies as unworthy. Some church bodies insist that we need to have multiple non-biblical ceremonies. We recognize that there is considerable freedom for the conscience of the Christian to use a cultural practice in worship.

Why All the Ceremonies?

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Some church bodies teach that government is useless. Some see it as a necessary evil. Some want the government to take care of everything.

What's a biblical response to the civil government?

Acts 5:29

Romans 13

What does this mean?

1 Corinthians 7:2

What does this not mean?

John 18:36

What does this tell us about how God works in us?

Romans 10:10

Who is our final authority?

Lutherans confess that we are allowed “to use legitimate political ordinances” (*Apology* 16, par. 54). We also obey commands which do not require us to reject the Gospel.

What are some wrong opinions about civil government?

- 1) Christians cannot hold public office.
- 2) Perfection is found by avoiding government.
- 3) The civil government should be destroyed.
- 4) The family, as governance, should be destroyed.

What's the Government For?

#16 of the *That You May Know* Bible Study Series

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Western culture has mixed feelings about the coming of Christ.

Some think it's like a zombie apocalypse that will ruin everything.
Some think it's something made up by Christians to scare them.
Some think it's great news.
Some think it's simply a foolish tale.

What do you think people are expecting?

What does the Bible tell us to expect?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:2

What will be the outcome of Jesus' second coming?

Matthew 25:31-46

How would you summarize the news of the second coming?

How does the Apostle Paul summarize the news?

2 Timothy 4:8

Christ Returning?

Is the coming of Christ good news for you?

#17 of the *That You May Know* Bible Study Series

What are some unbiblical views of the end?

- 1) Punishment for those condemned by God will come to an end.

- 2) The devil will receive his punishment and it will end.

- 3) Before the end, godly people will control the whole world and suppress the ungodly.

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The nature of the human will is a challenging question. American Christianity has several ways of thinking about it. In brief, is human will free? Explain your answer.

One of the roots of the trouble we have with Pelagius is how to define good and evil. Give your brief definition of them.

Augustine of Hippo, who knew Pelagius and debated with him, described it this way (quoted in the Augsburg Confession, article 18).

(Augustine's *Hypognosticon*, book 3) “We grant that all people have a free will. It is free as far as it has the judgment of reason. This does not mean that it is able, without God, either to begin, or at least to complete, anything that has to do with God. It is free only in works of this life, whether good or evil. Good I call those works that spring from the good in nature, such as willing to labor in the field, to eat and drink, to have a friend, to clothe oneself, to build a house, to marry a wife, to raise cattle, to learn various useful arts, or whatsoever good applies to this life. For all of these things depend on the providence of God. They are from Him and exist through Him. Works that are willing to worship an idol, to commit murder, and so forth, I call evil.”

Pelagius, in the late 4th to early 5th centuries, taught that humans are born with no sin and that they were completely free to make any kind of moral choices. What problems can we find with that idea?

1 Corinthians 2:12-16

The difficulty may be resolved if we assume a difference between a will to do physical tasks and a will to be spiritually obedient.

Ephesians 2:1-6

Galatians 3:2-6

Matthew 7:18

Hebrews 11:6

Lutherans distinguish between civil righteousness and spiritual righteousness. We have a free will in the first, but depend on God's grace in the second.

Free Will

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This particular study is more philosophically and logically driven than most.

Did “the devil make me do it”?

Consider John 8:44

Lutherans sometimes distinguish between our nature and our essence.

nature:

essence:

What if sin is part of the human essence?

What if sin is part of the fallen human nature?

We can observe that we all sin.

When are we to blame for sin?

When is God to blame for sin?

What does God do about sin?

Reflect on the idea that Christ has a completely human nature but one without sin.

What hope do we have as a new creation in Christ?

Where Does Sin Come From?

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To build a foundation for the rest of this study, read and consider Ephesians 2:8-10.

Are we justified only by grace through faith?

How do some church bodies confuse the nature of justification and suggest works play a role?

Why is it confusing and harmful when people suggest that good works play a role in justification?

Lutherans confess that fallen humans suffer from *opinio legis* – the attitude which says even though we are justified by grace, our works contribute something to our salvation.

Key question: Do you believe that Jesus has forgiven you all your sin?

Positive:

1 Timothy 2:5

John 14:6-7

Romans 5:1-2

Negative:

Galatians 5:4

James 2:19

Romans 8:7

Romans 3:11-12

1 Corinthians 2:14

What confidence do we have?

1 Peter 5:6-7

Romans 10:13

Acts 10:43

Romans 4:16

“Inexperienced and irreverent people . . . dream that Christian righteousness is nothing but civil and philosophical righteousness”
(Augsburg Confession XX, par. 18).

How then do we live?
Matthew 16:24

Ephesians 2:10

What Are Good Works (For)?

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Christians give appropriate honor to those who have gone before them, especially those who serve as examples.

1 John 2:1

Who are some of the people you would honor? Why?

John 14:13

Would we expect that the dead in Christ still pray?

Zechariah 1:12

Discuss the idea. We ask living people to pray. Would we ask people who are alive in Christ but dead in the flesh to pray?

How do biblical characters serve us as examples? Give some specifics.

Who hears and answers our prayers? How does this encourage us?

1 Timothy 2:5-6

What Christian saints have a clear role of praying for others?

Honoring the Saints?

We do not know that the saints who went before us would hear our prayers. We do know that Jesus hears our prayers and that he is the mediator.

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During the Middle Ages, the practice of priests receiving both bread and wine but lay people receiving only bread in communion had developed. The Reformers restored use of both bread and wine.

Early in Christianity, “the breaking of bread” came to refer to communion, including food and drink.

What do disciples receive?

Matthew 26:26-28

1 Corinthians 11:23-29

What assurance do we have when we receive the body and blood of the Lord?

John 6:51-56

What does it imply when different parts of the Church receive different elements in communion?

Different church bodies have different ways they deal with the bread and wine in communion, especially after a communion service. These practices are common in Lutheran circles. Think about why each one would be done.

Consecrate only the bread and wine which will be used in that service.

Consume all the consecrated elements.

After the service, wash the chalice (and any individual cups used) with water and return the water to the earth.

Bury uneaten consecrated bread.

Both Bread and Wine

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The sixth commandment speaks clearly about adultery, thus affirming chastity. A celibate life was early recognized as a life specifically dedicated to service.

Distinguish between celibacy and chastity.

What temptations would a celibate pastor face?

1 Corinthians 7:2, 8-9

Matthew 19:9-11

Does the Bible consider marriage a good thing?

Genesis 1:28

Genesis 2:24-25

An “overseer,” a “bishop,” and a “pastor” are the same thing in the New Testament.

1 Timothy 3:2

1 Timothy 4:1-3

Marriage and Pastors

Marriage of priests was common until the late Middle Ages
(*Augusburg Confession* 23:12).

What does it say about Christianity when ministers are put into
situations which make chastity particularly difficult?

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In the 16th century, Lutheran reformers were accused of ending “the mass.” By this, their opponents said they were not celebrating communion.

Lutherans had moved to often using the native language of the people. Some considered this an inappropriate move.

1 Corinthians 14:2, 9-12

Why would teaching about the value of communion be helpful?

Colossians 1:9-10

Psalm 111:4-5

Is the ceremony of value when it is not understood but is simply observed by spectators?

The Reformers objected to Masses being performed to collect money.

1 Timothy 3:2-3

1 Corinthians 11:27-31

The Mass was considered to take away sins for the living and the dead, regardless of their faith or participation. We call this understanding of it *ex opere operato*, meaning that by simply doing it the effect is there.

Why would this understanding lead to celebrating the mass more often?

Is Christ offered again in the Mass? In what way is the celebration a sacrifice?

Hebrews 10:10-14

Luke 22:19

The practice of the Lutheran Reformation was to celebrate the Mass “every holy day” - i.e., on Sundays and other church festivals, and to make it available at other times for any who desired it (Augsburg Confession 24, paragraph 39, Apology 24, paragraph 1). They had decreased the frequency as compared with much of the Church of the day, which offered it daily.

Why do some modern Christians celebrate communion less than weekly? Discuss reasons.

Mass, or Frequency of Communion

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Lutherans did not stop the process of confession and forgiveness, as some said they did. However, they wanted to be sure people understood its power.

How is it important to examine ourselves and confess our sins?

1 Corinthians 11:27-32

Matthew 16:16-19

John 12:27-32

What hope do we have when we confess our sins before God?

Should we strive to confess all our sins before God?

What comfort is there if we cannot remember all our sins to confess them?

Psalm 19:7-13

Jeremiah 17:9-10

Psalm 37:3-6

Do we trust our heart? Why?

Whom do we trust? Why?

What does Jesus do with our sins?

Colossians 2:11-15

Confession Revisited

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Over several centuries, customs of fasting from certain foods and drinks on certain dates or occasions grew up in Christianity. These customs may well be good, but they are not to replace God's Word.

What are some of the food and drink customs you associate with dates or occasions?

How do we regard others based on what they eat or the holidays they observe?

Romans 14:1-15:2

If Christ has destroyed the power of sin, what effect does fasting or eating have?

What value is there in living in such a way we are distinct from our broader culture?

Are normal traditions able to earn us favor with God?

Matthew 15:2-6, 9, 11

Romans 14:7

Colossians 2:16, 20-21

Acts 15:10-11

1 Timothy 4:12

Christians live a disciplined life, but not to earn God's favor. This also applies to what we eat or drink.

Luke 21:34

1 Corinthians 9:27

1 Corinthians 14:40

Eat This, Not That?

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What are the first few things that come to mind when you think about a monk or a nun?

Monastic vows were often seen as more important than Scripture.

Matthew 15:9

Galatians 5:4

Early monasticism was an attempt to get away from cultural pressures and be dedicated to God's Word and prayer. As time passed, rules increased and many were sent into monastic life by family members.

How does God enable us to live in our society?

By the 16th century monastic vows were often taken at a young age and lasted for life. They prohibited marriage and family.

1 Corinthians 7:1-2

When and why does God lead us to part from our society?

Genesis 2:18

Why would a family urge a child to enter into the monastic orders?

Is there a way a group of Christians such as a monastic order could live well within their society?

How does monasticism show itself in current Christian thought, faith, and practice in today's cultures?

thought

faith

practice

When is it positive and when is it negative?

Should I Become a Monk?

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Since it is easy to confuse power and authority in the temporal and eternal kingdoms, we should think about what churchly authority is and does.

John 20:21-23

John 18:36

2 Corinthians 10:4-5

Luke 10:16

Galatians 1:8

In this sense, what authority do church leaders have?

Normally we assume an authority to impose rules or guidelines to promote good order. What are some examples of this?

Why are we warned against some types of regulations?

Matthew 15:11

Romans 14:17

Colossians 2:20-23

Galatians 5:1

What is an appropriate response to godly leadership and guidance?

Hebrews 13:17

Matthew 23:3

Acts 5:29

Matthew 11:6

How are the characteristics of church leaders similar to the characteristics any godly person should show?

What Do Church Leaders Do?

How are church leaders to be different from the average godly person?

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Wittenberg Door Campus Ministry provides on-site pastoral care and Bible discussion groups for the students, faculty, staff, and administration in the collegiate communities in and around Columbia, Missouri.



Bring a friend, make a friend!

A Brief Service of Scripture and Prayer

Opening Versicles LSB 285

- L** O Lord, open my lips,
 - C** **and my mouth will declare Your praise.**
 - L** Make haste, O God, to deliver me;
 - C** **make haste to help me, O Lord.**
- Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

Readings

Kyrie LSB 285

- L** O Lord,
- C** **have mercy.**
- L** O Christ,
- C** **have mercy.**
- L** O Lord,
- C** **have mercy.**

Lord's Prayer

- C** **Our Father who art in heaven,**
hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
- For Thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.**

Apostles' Creed

C I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day He rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life \dagger everlasting. Amen.

Versicles *LSB 286*

L Hear my prayer, O Lord;
C let my cry come to You.
L In the day of my trouble I call upon You,
C for You answer me.
L Hide Your face from my sins,
C and blot out all my iniquities.
L Create in me a clean heart, O God,
C and renew a right spirit within me.
L Cast me not away from Your presence,
C and take not Your Holy Spirit from me.
L Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
C and uphold me with a willing spirit.
L Because Your steadfast love is better than life,
C my lips will praise You.
L For You have been my help,
C and in the shadow of Your wings I will sing for joy.
L Teach me Your way, O Lord, that I may walk in Your truth;
C unite my heart to fear Your name.

L I give thanks to You, O Lord my God, with my whole heart,
C and I will glorify Your name forever.
L May all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You.
C May those who love Your salvation say evermore, "God is great!"
L Save Your people and bless Your heritage!
C Be their shepherd and carry them forever.
L Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer;
C listen to my plea for grace.

Collect of the Day

Morning

C I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son,
that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray
that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my
doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself,
my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that
the evil foe may have no power over me.

Evening

C I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son,
that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would
forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me
this night. For into your hands I commend myself, my body and soul,
and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may
have no power over me.

Benedicamus *LSB 287*

L Let us bless the Lord.
C Thanks be to God.

Blessing *LSB 287*

L The Lord bless us, defend us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life.
C Amen.

Acknowledgments

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